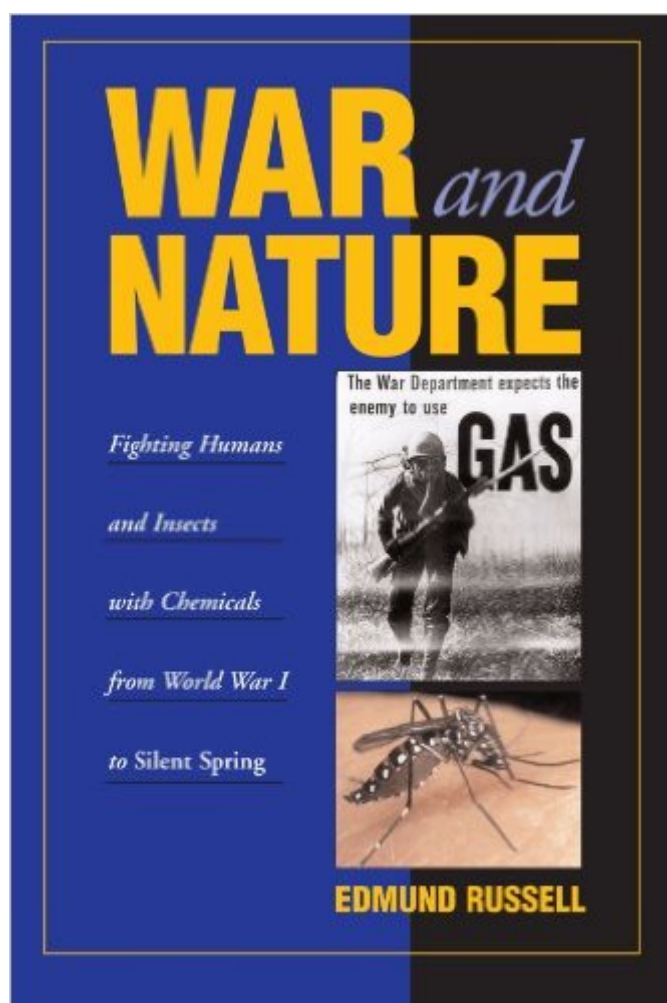


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# War And Nature: Fighting Humans And Insects With Chemicals From World War I To Silent Spring (Studies In Environment And History)



## Synopsis

While cultural and scholarly traditions have led us to believe that war and control of nature are separate, there are many more similarities than most people might suspect. Tracing the history of chemical warfare and pest control, Edmund Russell shows how war and control of nature coevolved. Ideologically, institutionally, and technologically, the paths of chemical warfare and pest control intersected repeatedly in the twentieth century. *War and Nature* helps us to understand the impact of war on nature and vice versa, as well as the development of total war, and the rise of the modern environmental movement. Edmund Russell is an assistant professor in the Division of Technology, Culture, and Communication in the School of Engineering and Applied Science at the University of Virginia. This is his first book.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In *War and Nature* Edmund Russell, Associate Professor of Technology, Culture, and Communication at the University of Virginia, cleverly traces the interaction between chemical warfare and pest control from World War I to the Vietnam War. His central thesis is that war and control of nature have coevolved: "the control of nature expanded the scale of war, and war expanded the scale on which people controlled nature" (p. 2). Following up on his dissertation (University of Michigan, 1993), which won the Rachel Carson Prize from the American Society for Environmental History, Russell culled a wide variety of recently declassified U.S. government documents, business publications, and contemporary books and articles. Russell finds that World

Wars I and II and the Cold War forged close ties between military and scientific institutions, and efforts to maintain such links became hallmarks of the post-World War II era. Scientifically and technologically, pest control and chemical warfare each created knowledge and tools that reinforced the other (p. 4) For example, on the eve of World War I, there were few U.S. chemical companies. They manufactured primarily low-profit bulk chemicals. In contrast, Germany had the best chemical factories and schools and had the largest output of sophisticated products. Eight German companies made up almost 80 percent of the world's dyes (p. 18). However, the increased use of mustard and chlorine gas in the war boosted the demand by European allies for these chemicals from the United States. The "Chemical Warfare Service" was created within the U.S. Army to employ civilian chemists to conduct research on war gases.

War and Nature: Fighting Humans and Insects with Chemicals from World War I to Silent Spring. By Edmund Russell. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 315 pp. ISBN 0-521-79937-6. Call no. QH 545. C48 R87 2001.) Boll Weevils and Lice and Mosquitoes, oh my! In the twentieth century insects and humans were common enemies. War and Nature is an exploration into the evolution of chemical warfare and pesticides from World War I to Rachel Carson's revolutionary book Silent Spring (1962). Russell explains how the cyclical nature of war and peace throughout the twentieth century developed a powerhouse of chemists who worked diligently to discover new formulas applicable in warfare and at home. He states, "war and the control of nature co-evolved: the control of nature expanded the scale of war, and war expanded the scale on which people controlled nature. More specifically, the control of nature formed one root of total war, and total war helped expand the control of nature to the scale rued by modern environmentalists" (p. 2). He uses convincing economic and natural evidence to support his claims, proving his clear cut thesis. Modern warfare was fought mainly across the Atlantic Ocean, but Russell points out the ecological results were felt on all sides of the globe. Americans developed a love for pesticides in the chemical age; Russell proves their love was a product of large corporations and excellent propaganda advertisements used to erase the line between military and civilian terminology. By the time U.S. troops were sent into the First World War, entomologists had discovered insects spread some infectious diseases.

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